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ABSTRACT

Based on Thomas Paine's pamphlet "Common Sense," this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand that as the American Revolution approached, writers created highly persuasive documents calling for separation from England. The main activity in the lesson involves students in writing a persuasive essay. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:

The American Revolution: The Declaration and Beyond

LENGTH OF LESSON: One class period

GRADE LEVEL: 6-8

SUBJECT AREA: U.S. History

CREDIT: Paula Kasper, media specialist, Hoover Middle School, Rockville, Maryland.

OBJECTIVES: Students will understand the following:

1. As the American Revolution approached, writers created highly persuasive documents calling for separation from England.

MATERIALS:
For this lesson, you will need:

Excerpt from Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (see Procedures)

PROCEDURE:

1. Tell students that they will (1) use a part of Thomas Paine's 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense* as a jumping-off point for learning about argumentation, or persuasive writing, and (2) write their own arguments, or persuasive essays.

2. Distribute to each student a copy of the excerpt, reprinted here, from the third part of *Common Sense*, preferably a copy that the student can annotate and otherwise mark up. (You may prefer to use other sections from the pamphlet, the entire text of which you can find by going to Project Gutenberg at promo and entering author, last name first, and title of the document.)

Excerpt from the Project Gutenberg text of *Common Sense*:

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THOUGHTS ON THE PRESENT STATE OF AMERICAN AFFAIRS

In the following pages I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense... Volumes have been written on the subject of the struggle between England and America. Men of all ranks have embarked in the controversy, from different motives, and with various designs; but all have been ineffectual, and the period of debate is closed. Arms, as the last resource, decide this contest; the appeal was the choice of the king, and the continent hath accepted the challenge... The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. 'Tis not the affair of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom, but of a continent—of at least one eighth part of the habitable globe. 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected, even to the end of time, by the proceedings now. Now is the seed-time of continental union, faith and honour. The least fracture now will be like a name engraved with the point of a pin on the tender rind of a young oak; the wound will enlarge with the tree, and posterity read it in full grown characters. By referring the matter from argument to arms, a new era for politics is struck; a new method of thinking hath arisen. All plans, proposals, &c. prior to the nineteenth of April, i.e. to the commencement of hostilities, are like the almanacs of the last year; which, though proper then are superseded and useless now. Whatever was advanced by the advocates on either side of the question then, terminated in one and the same point, viz. a union with Great-Britain: the only difference between the parties was the method of effecting it; the one proposing force, the other friendship; but it hath so far happened that the first hath failed, and the second hath withdrawn her influence. As much hath been said of the advantages of reconciliation which, like an agreeable dream, hath passed away and left us as we were, it is but right, that we should examine the contrary side of the argument, and inquire into some of the many material injuries which these colonies sustain, and always will sustain, by being connected with, and dependent on Great Britain: To examine that connection and dependence, on the principles of nature and common sense, to see what we have to trust to, if separated, and what we are to expect, if dependant. I have heard it asserted by some, that as America hath flourished under her former connection with Great Britain that the same connection is necessary towards her future happiness, and will always have the same effect. Nothing can be more fallacious than this kind of argument. We may as well assert that because a child has thrived upon milk that it is never to have meat, or that the first twenty years of our lives is to become a precedent for the next twenty. But even this is admitting more than is true, for I answer roundly, that America would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European power had any thing to do with her. The commerce, by which she hath enriched herself, are the necessaries of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe. But she has protected us, say some. That she has engrossed us is true, and defended the continent at our expense as well as her own is admitted, and she would have defended Turkey from the same motive, viz. the sake of trade and dominion. Alas, we have been long led away by ancient prejudices, and made large sacrifices to superstition. We have boasted the protection of Great Britain, without considering, that her motive was INTEREST not ATTACHMENT; that she did not protect us from OUR ENEMIES on OUR ACCOUNT, but from HER ENEMIES on HER OWN ACCOUNT, from those who had no quarrel with us on any OTHER ACCOUNT, and who will always be our enemies on the SAME ACCOUNT.

3. Discuss with students what Paine's overall argument is in the foregoing. Ask where in the excerpt Paine states opinions and where he states facts. Discuss where he appeals to his reader's logic and where he appeals to his reader's heart. Ask why both appeals are important.

4. Leaving Paine, alert your students to all the modern-day issues that they may want to tackle in an argument. Make sure students understand the difference between *argument* used as the everyday term meaning "disagreement or quarrel" and *argument* as it is used in this project—a written statement of opinion supported by various kinds of appeals.

5. List the following topics that may engage students, and add others that students themselves suggest as candidates for written arguments:

- Too much traffic in the community
- Unregulated growth of housing in the community
- Endangered animals or natural resources in the region
- Inequities in education—the haves and have-nots; the digital divide

6. Give students the following advice to follow during the prewriting stage of presenting arguments of their own:

- Once a writer has in mind something that he or she wants to persuade readers of, the writer puts it in the form of a thesis statement: a statement—made in one or sometimes two sentences—that announces what will follow in the essay. You may want to fine-tune the definition of *thesis statement* to include not only the announcement of a topic but also the claim that the writer is making about that topic.

- The writer should gather all manner of support, or evidence, for the position he or she gives in the thesis statement: reasons, examples, facts, statistics, quotations.

- The writer should determine in which order he or she will present the evidence. Two approaches are to go from most important to least important or vice versa.

- The writer should figure out what he or she wants readers not only to think but also to *do*.

- The writer should anticipate what critics will say to undermine his or her argument. The writer should come up with responses to criticism.

7. Pick up the Paine theme again by reminding students that *Common Sense* had an electrifying effect on the American population. Challenge students to write an essay that will ignite people in your community regarding one of the issues listed previously or students' own issues.

ADAPTATIONS:

Adaptations for Older Students:
Consider asking students also to examine other persuasive works by Paine—for example, essays in *The American Crisis* series and *The Rights of Man*—and to analyze their rhetorical effectiveness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Benjamin Franklin and his son William took different sides in the American Revolution. They did not speak to each other after the war began. How do you think your relationship would be affected if you disagreed with a member of your family about politics?

2. George Washington, Benedict Arnold, Thomas Paine, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson were rebels. Debate the correctness of their cause.

3. The American population was divided about participating in a revolution. One-third supported the revolution; one-third was loyal to the British, and one-third was indifferent. Discuss and analyze each of these positions.

4. To preserve his army, George Washington used the tactic of retreating from the battlefield. Analyze this military tactic.

5. Nathan Hale spied on British defenses and is considered a national hero. Discuss the concept of national loyalty and the responsibilities a citizen has to his country.

6. Joseph Plumb Martin was 15 when he joined the army and he remained in the army for the entire war. A constant problem for the Continental Army was recruiting and retaining soldiers. Why do you think Martin stayed? What would you have done?

EVALUATION:

You can evaluate your students' arguments, or persuasive essays, using the following three-point rubric:
Three points: exceptionally clearly expressed thesis statement; substantial and varied appeals in support of argument; well-articulated responses to anticipated objections to argument; error-free grammar, usage, and mechanics

Two points: adequately expressed thesis statement; sufficient and varied appeals in support of argument; attempt to respond to anticipated objections to argument; some errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

One point: inadequately expressed thesis statement; insufficient and unvaried appeals in support of argument; absence of responses to anticipated objections to argument; many errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

You can have students contribute to the assessment rubric by determining how many and what kinds of appeals the persuasive essays should include.

EXTENSION:

Supply Line Logistics
Explain to students that the American rebels used initiative, daring, and well-thought-out logistics to win the Revolutionary War. Logistics involves the moving of people and materials from one point to another. Raise the question "How do we handle logistics in modern times?" Encourage students to think about natural disasters such as earthquakes and fires. Assuming their community didn't feel the brunt of a natural disaster, how should that community respond to a nearby community that was devastated? Ask students to describe a relief plan in detail. What would they need to get into the community, and how would they get it there? Alternatively, whom would they have to get out of the damaged community, and how would they go about that task?

A Second Declaration of Independence
If your students have had a chance to study the Declaration of Independence, now give them an opportunity to read or reread Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in light of the declaration. Ask students to comment on how the later document reflects the earlier one. What does Gary Wills, the historian and writer, mean when he says the address marks a refounding of America?

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Tom Paine: Voice of Revolution (Milton Meltzer Biographies Series)
Milton Meltzer, Franklin Watts, Incorporated, 1996
Recommended for grades 9-12, this biography of the early American essayist and pamphleteer brings us closer to one of the true patriots of the revolution. Descriptions of *Common Sense* and other pivotal writings are balanced by insight into his difficult personality.

George Washington
Wendie C. Old, Enslow Publishers, 1997
An autobiography of George Washington, in the publisher's "United States Presidents" series geared toward junior high school readers, that covers his life from childhood through presidency.

American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence
Pauline Maier, Knopf, 1997
This book describes the second Continental Congress evolving into a national government, the influence of Thomas Paine's book *Common Sense*, the influence of the document immediately following its signing, and how President Lincoln ensured the Declaration of Independence would remain a living force in American society. It is very scholarly and long, and thus appropriate for older, highly interested and motivated students.

WEB LINKS:

Maryland Loyalists and the American Revolution
Want the other side of the story? This Web site offers information and links about those who remained loyal to Great Britain during the American Revolution.
http://www.erols.com/candidus/index.htm

The Declaration of Independence
What influenced Thomas Jefferson as he wrote The Declaration of Independence? What has happened to the original document? What other documents related to the war and the founding of the new nation are stored at the National Archives? Visit this site to see the documents that shaped a nation.
http://www.nara.gov:80/exhall/charters/declaration/decmain.html

The Virtual Marching Tour of the American Revolution
This site bills itself as "The Philadelphia Campaign—1777, From Rebels to Mature Army," but it is much more. Really a collection of sites compiled by the Independence Hall Association, the site examines the people, battles, events, and documents of the Revolution.
http://www.ushistory.org/march/index.html

The History Place: American Revolution
Get background plus all the details you need about the entire course of the American Revolution. The site also includes five tips for students on how to write a better history paper.
http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/revolution/index.html

The Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies
In addition to the Declaration of Independence itself along with the list of signers, this site also offers a "Brief Summary of Events Leading to the American Revolution" and "The Events of 1776 Leading to the Declaration of Independence."
http://www.worldquest.com/law/declare.htm

VOCABULARY:

rebels
Those who oppose or disobey one in authority.
Context:
American colonists were known as rebels in their fight against the British.

inventory
An itemized list of goods or supplies.
Context:
Taking an inventory of military supplies, the rebels found that they were sorely in need of ammunition.

coveted
Wished for enviously.
Context:
Washington coveted the military supplies stored in Quebec.

reconciliation
The restoration of friendship or harmony.
Context:
The rebels disagreed as to what they were fighting for, whether to reconcile differences or for independence.

mercenaries
Soldiers hired into foreign service who fight merely for wages.
Context:
Being mercenaries, the Hessians had no lasting loyalty to the British.

deploy
To strategically spread out, utilize, or arrange a military unit.
Context:
General Clinton planned to deploy 20,000 troops to fight the rebels.

flotilla
A fleet of ships or boats.
Context:
To the rebel fleet, the flotilla of British vessels seemed to approach all at once.

defection
Conscious abandonment of allegiance or duty.
Context:
Defection was a problem in the ranks of the rebel army.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Grade Level: 6-8

Subject Area: civics

Standard: Understands the concept of a constitution, the various purposes that constitutions serve, and the conditions that contribute to the establishment and maintenance of constitutional government.

Benchmarks: Understands the importance of political leadership, public service, and a knowledgeable citizenry in American constitutional democracy.

Grade Level: 6-8, 9-12

Subject Area: U.S. history

Standard: Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in shaping the revolutionary movement, and reasons for the American victory.

Benchmarks:
Understands the strategic elements of the Revolutionary War (e.g., how the Americans won the war against superior British resources, American and British military leaders, major military campaigns).

Understands the major developments and chronology of the Revolutionary War and the roles of its political, military, and diplomatic leaders (e.g., George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Richard Henry Lee).

Understands perspectives of and the roles played in the American Revolution by various groups of people (e.g., men, women, white settlers, free and enslaved African-Americans, and Native Americans).

Grade Level: 6-8, 9-12

Subject Area: U.S. history

Standard: Understands the impact of the American Revolution on politics, economy, and society.

Benchmarks:
Understands how the ideals of the American Revolution influenced the goals of various groups of people during and after the war.

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Video Information and Comprehension Questions

Video Description
Learn why Jefferson was a reluctant author of the Declaration, and how elusiveness, as much as anything, defined General Washington's early campaigns. Then follow the fateful crossing of the Delaware, and the subsequent battles that made Washington a legend.

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TITLE OF VIDEO:

The Revolutionary War: Declarations of Independence & Victory or Death

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. What were George Washington's reactions when he was asked to take charge of the Continental army?

2. Who were the two military leaders chosen by Washington to lead the attack on Canada?

3. What did Thomas Paine's pamphlet, *Common Sense* attack?

4. Who were three of the people Congress appointed to draft a Declaration of Independence?

5. How did the British respond to the Declaration of Independence?

6. What was the first formal battle the Americans fought and lost during the Revolution?

7. Why did Congress establish a day of prayer in the winter of 1776?

8. What was the importance of the Battles of Trenton and Princeton?

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The Revolutionary War: Declarations of Independence & Victory or Death

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. What were George Washington's reactions when he was asked to take charge of the Continental army?
George Washington was discouraged when he first took charge of the Continental army because the troops lacked discipline and there wasn't enough cannon, muskets, or gunpowder.

2. Who were the two military leaders chosen by Washington to lead the attack on Canada?
The two military leaders appointed by George Washington to lead the attack on Canada (Quebec) were Major General Richard Montgomery and Colonel Benedict Arnold.

3. What did Thomas Paine's pamphlet, *Common Sense* attack?
Thomas Paine's pamphlet, *Common Sense*, attacked the English monarchy as a form of government for the American colonies and stated that the colonies were at war with England.

4. Who were three of the people Congress appointed to draft a Declaration of Independence?
Three of the people appointed by Congress to draft a Declaration of Independence were Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson.

5. How did the British respond to the Declaration of Independence?
In response to the Declaration of Independence, the British sent the largest force of soldiers, sailors, and warships ever assembled to America to crush the rebellion. The British also hired Hessian soldiers from Germany to help fight the colonists.

6. What was the first formal battle the Americans fought and lost during the Revolution?
The Americans fought and lost their first formal battle on Long Island.

7. Why did Congress establish a day of prayer in the winter of 1776?
Congress established a day of prayer to encourage recruits to join the army.

8. What was the importance of the Battles of Trenton and Princeton?
The importance of the Battles of Trenton and Princeton was their impact on citizen morale and on recovering most of New Jersey as a recruiting ground for soldiers.

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